

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

No surfing at the seaside

After managing to smuggle a Mars bar past airport security, David Robinson finds that connecting to the internet in Tenerife is not quite so simple

Fed up with the winter gloom, Mrs R and I decided to head for some sunshine. The internet is an excellent tool for ferreting out cheap last-minute deals, and certainly better than traipsing round the travel agents in the drizzle looking for late bargains that have usually "just gone" the minute you walk through the door.

The original plan was to book months ago and return to Jamaica, but Mrs R had a client who supposedly wanted to install a major system extension around the beginning of March so, in the interests of good customer service, we decided to leave the booking until the last minute. As it turned out, the custards were in their usual state of organisation and hadn't even agreed the specification by the time we would have been leaving.

JAMAICA? NO, SHE WENT OF HER OWN ACCORD

Last-minute deals to Jamaica, it seems, are not on offer. There were a few in Barbados, but only for somewhere that's seven hours' walk to the beach. Portugal was a possibility but madam said no – the last time we went there we ended up in the back of beyond and it was bloody freezing. The Canary Islands had loads of deals on offer and, avoiding all the dodgy "we'll tell you where you're staying when you get there and it's too late to back out" offers, we opted for a four-star hotel at two-star prices. At a known location. Booked, paid for online and off we went.

Take-off from Manchester was 7.55am and the itinerary said we had to be there three hours before to allow for the extra security. I would have ignored that, but Mrs R won't countenance upsetting officialdom so insisted we set off at 2am (strange that she doesn't mind upsetting me by being late when we're going out). I'm taking the little JVC sub-notebook just in case I need to do any client support (what a saddo) and a Palm Tungsten with removable SD memory cards as it makes a good MP3 player. And a Fuji digital camera. And a charger for each. The JVC is also useful as a backup device for the digital



pictures. Hope I don't exceed the baggage allowance.

We got to security with hours to spare, and the place was heaving – at 4am, for goodness' sake. My bag went through the x-ray machine and the operator started getting all agitated and pointing at the image of something in my bag. "I want to examine that in detail!" he demanded of a colleague in a pseudo-police uniform who dragged me off to one side. It was my own fault, I suppose, for taking all that electronic kit. He emptied the contents of my rucksack all over the desk. The offending item? A king-size Mars bar!

EMAIL INTUITION

Last year in Jamaica dealing with email was a doddle. Although there was a pay-as-you-go terminal, I managed to bypass that and get a WiFi connection into the hotel network. I couldn't browse the internet because I couldn't get a response from their DNS server, but that didn't matter: I could ping our office router. That meant I could simply create a VPN tunnel back to our main server and from there jump to anywhere I had security clearance to go, collect email and browse the web.

Incidentally, Alan reports that you can do a similar trick in some Travelodges, which apparently have TV delivered over Ethernet. Again you can't browse the internet (for the same DNS reason) but he uses

that connection to VPN to the server and so can pull the same trick to get anywhere else he wants.

Tenerife was not as accommodating. Endless amounts of walking about waving the Tungsten around produced not a sniff of a WiFi network, secure or otherwise. The hotel had one miserable pay terminal that had a penchant for swallowing euros but not delivering a connection. I complained and got my money back and, after day two, it wore a permanent sign of shame taped to the screen indicating 'out of order'. And it was screwed to the wall so there was no opportunity to shift it over a bit to get access to the Ethernet plug. Would I do that?

Eventually, about a mile away, we found a sign saying 'Internet Café'. Internet access there was. Coffee there was not. It was two euros for 15 minutes; beggars can't be choosers, I suppose. The only service on offer was internet browsing. I'd had all my emails diverted to a Yahoo! mailbox, which was full of crap, and it can take longer than you think to wade through the spam to get to something that really does need attention. Further time wasted away desperately searching for the @ key, which is in a totally different place on a Spanish keyboard. This wouldn't matter so much if the keyboard hadn't been hammered to the point where half the letters had worn off.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT

Fortunately, the only real problem to deal with was a custard who'd got their accounting system in a mess. The sum of all the sales ledger balances didn't add up to the total in the nominal ledger sales control account. They've done this before. Several times. Usually by posting journal entries to the control account without ensuring a corresponding entry in the sales ledger. Sage MMS has a ledger account parameter that blocks journal entries to accounts (such as control accounts) where it's not desirable to make postings. We always set the block. The custard then turns it off again.

The customer accountant, an old-fashioned type, commented that you never got these problems with "good old pen and paper". Well, for a start, the paper page never had the option to prevent idiots making the wrong kind of posting or even forcing you to get the entry on the correct side of the page. I was taught that the debit side is the one nearest the window.

Then there were 'smart' paper-based systems marketed by companies such as Kalamazoo. With these you made both entries at the same time using stationery that had holes down the side of a ledger card, and you used these to get correct alignment with the Day Book record sheet underneath. The theory was that, using carbon paper, the entry you made had to be the same on both records, so this supposedly eliminated the errors. Except I used to go on one audit where the ledgers never balanced, largely because they were kept by an octogenarian named Ryder who, at random intervals, would forget to put the carbon paper between the record cards. That really messed things up – give me a computer accounting system any day.

If you're too young to know what carbon paper is, look it up on Wikipedia. ☐

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